

As a 21st Century English language arts teacher, I could easily check off every single one of those standards noting how I encourage youth to be collaborative, creative, and critical in their thinking, reading, speaking, and writing--but many English teachers would agree with me that it's much more than meeting the standards. Can my students witness my love of inquiry and learning as easily as they can search up their favorite meme? Do they gush, guffaw, and "geek out" over the author's use of imagery and metaphor right along with me? This is what drives me day to day, class to class; I want my middle school students to get excited again about language and the human experience that can be conveyed within the deliberate strokes of ink or key. As I teach, I am not just modeling a lesson or modeling how to think while I read. I confess to them when my eyes tear up, when my gut wrenches, when my blood boils right along with the characters who have just now become a reality in the classroom. Yes, we are teaching a much needed trait called empathy when we are physically and emotionally moved as the text moves; however, we do not only teach the example, we live as the example.

Even as I live the example of a love for learning and language, I must accept that not every person in the classroom will gladly connect with the text in front of them. It is crucial to get innovative yet supportive at the same time. Whenever my students embark on a new piece of writing, it is not until we have glossed over the word choice and gleaned ideas from the structure of what we hail as mentor text in diverse published works. We read a broad range of texts from news articles, poetry, social media posts, literary works, and memoirs. Here I reassure the reluctant writer that it is okay to emulate the style of our admired poets and authors in order to jumpstart our

own writing engine. A specific exercise I incorporate is providing a literary excerpt for the student to model by replacing particular parts of speech with their own. It is a quick but enjoyable exercise and it provokes conversation; students are invested in their writing and eager to share the changes they have made from the meaning of the original text.

Ever try getting a student to stop working on analyzing the plot of a short story? Usually an effortless task but when coding is involved, good luck! By integrating STEM activities into English language arts, I give students the opportunity to represent the traditional plot diagram of a story with an app-controlled robot ball. With the well-known plot diagram outlined across the classroom floor, students code a ball with actions, sounds, and colored lights to tell the story of a literary work their group selected. This takes collaboration, planning, and critical thinking for students to convey the major storyline to the rest of the class. It is a good day when you overhear students passionately justifying their reasoning behind a certain color to represent a character's emotion or action in a story.

One of the difficult challenges I face in middle school English language arts is providing a place for the students to keep track of and talk about their independent reading. I incorporated an online message board where students' names were color coded for slight anonymity, and they could share a quick summary and reaction about their book under the corresponding genre heading. By transforming typical reading logs and book reports, I provided a forum where students felt safe to share and could revise their thoughts before they posted their reading responses and recommendations.

The biggest obstacle I overcame this year was implementing Augmented Reality into English language arts. Admittedly, I was intimidated by what I saw about Augmented Reality in other schools across the country yet I wanted to give my rural small-town students the same opportunity. I jumped in and initiated contact with the support team of an AR site as I gingerly created my first AR experience. I learned with my students as we developed our first Augmented Reality experience. Through this platform, my students created interactive experiences from core reading skills like inferences, literary devices, and figurative language which they later shared at a family night event. I could have had them take a quiz over these skills or give them practice sheets, but this won them over by far.

With the 21st Century classroom, comes the perpetual need for ongoing learning communities and professional development. Education has to be an experience for the student—not just the consumption of lessons presented by the adult in the room. With that realization, I seek professional learning activities that incorporate technology into the English classroom as a medium to improve the quality of interaction. Being part of a GAFE school district, I continually seek improvement in using educational apps in the classroom. My training in Schlechty, Learning Sciences International, and Google Education, also helps me develop priorities in the classroom: prescribe outlets for the students to be in charge of their learning, allow students to discuss and work out the concepts together, and provide for more student talk and less teacher talk about the writer's craft. This way we are developing the learner to a lifelong relationship with communication and people.